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THE ALLIANCE'S SECURITY WAS LEFT OUT IN THE COLD

NATO's Great Spy-Tingling Thriller

Here is a special report on the NATO spy scandal that caused "the biggest switch of nuclear and convention sites in NATO history." The dispatch was written by Express correspondents Colin Lawson from Bonn, Henry Lowry from Washington and Howard Williams in Brussels.

London Express Service

The biggest switch of nuclear and conventional weapons sites in NATO history has now been completed.

Following the wave of suicides in West Germany and defections to the country's Eastern sector by top military personnel, the Atlantic Alliance has changed almost every "system" on its books.

Weapon storage sites from the northern tip of Norway down to the Mediterranean coast of Italy have been moved, communications lines have been changed, coding and de-coding devices altered and security checks stepped up.

NATO headquarters in Brussels and SHAPE headquarters in Casteau, Belgium, have turned their organizations inside out in a massive clean-up operation.

MOST SERIOUS BLOW

NATO and SHAPE regard the latest series of espionage incidents as the most serious blow to their security ever known — even more serious than the Burgess-Maclean-Philby affair.

Alliance chiefs are convinced that thru German Admiral Hermann Luedke, the former deputy chief of logistics at SHAPE, the communist bloc have a very clear picture of all the West's military plans and maneuvers. And thru Nahit Imre, the 50-year-old former financial controller at NATO who is now awaiting trial in Ankara, the communists have a complete breakdown of the civilian structure and political organization behind the Alliance.

However, several of the moves in switching such things as communications lines and storage depots were planned before the wave of spy scares.

SHAPE is constantly altering its depot system as an insurance against communist espionage and plans for these changes are kept in the confines of the Supreme Allied Commander, Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer, his British deputy, Gen. Sir John Bray and the heads of the respective departments involved in the proposed switches.

Work had also begun on altering communications lines from overland telegraph wires to space satellites.

Ironically, this change was not made because of any fear of Soviet intelligence but as an insurance against France's growing policy of "non-cooperation". Many of the most important communications lines currently cross French territory.

Other changes, which have been pushed forward by the spy scares, include the mechanical scrambling and unscrambling devices used for "top-secret" telephone and telegraph discussions.

PROBE GOES ON

Meanwhile, further top level investigations are being made by visiting security teams from Britain and America in an effort to weed out any more possible espionage links.

At the last count the spy activities stretching from Italy to West Germany have resulted in four suicides, four arrests and six fugitives. But despite all the sensational ingredients of the mystery the one that really aroused the Americans was the trundling away in a wheel barrow from an allied base in West Germany of the 10-foot Sidewinder air-to-air missile. It was later airfreighted to Moscow.

Ironically, it is recognized that the extraordinary affair which would never have made the pages of a respectable writer of spy fiction has nothing to do with the macabre events and strange deaths and suicides reported in Western Europe.

The concern at Pentagon high levels is over what the Russians could learn from stolen or captured missiles. For example, if they discover how sensitive the guidance systems are they possibly could develop various types of counter-measures.

The full story of the great spy scandal has at first sight all the ingredients of a John Le Carre novel.

A VERY GRIM FARCE

But as the details unfold in a crazy-quilt pattern it takes on a touch of an old farce. Except that it is a very grim farce indeed, affecting as it does Western military security.

If officialdom is to be believed, there is no connection between the recent suicides nor between the suicide of 57-year-old SHAPE Admiral Hermann Luedke and recent arrests.

So far three men have been seized, a fourth is under interrogation. And the whisper persists in Karlsruhe, seat of the federal chief public prosecutor, that these are only the forerunners and that more arrests are imminent.

Whether there are links or not, the story must begin with the suicide of Gen. Horst Wendtland, 56-year-old regular army officer who was deputy head of the federal intelligence service, formerly famed as the Gehlen Organization.

There are marked discrepancies in statements made by officialdom over this death on Oct. 7. For some said Gen. Wendtland was cheerful, in his usual good health and showed no signs of worry when he led the usual morning conference at the closely guarded compound containing intelligence H. Q.

He strolled back to his office and 20 minutes later shot himself.

ILLNESS BLAMED

The secret was preserved for two days and was followed by a bald announcement that he was suffering from an incurable complaint. This was modified later to "an incurable depressive illness."

And then it transpired that he had been twice given sick leave over the past nine months and had been discharged on the last occasion as fit.

There are no public inquests in Germany and the usual private inquiry terminates in the usual secret file.

On the night Gen. Wendtland's death was announced the whisper went round in Bonn that another senior officer had been found dead.

The lights burned late that night on the Hardthoek, the high hill overlooking Bonn where the defense ministry, known as the Bonntagen, has its headquarters.

And senior officers were seen huddled in the quiet corner of a Bonn restaurant later but they lacked the usual gay demeanor of men relaxing after a day's work.

Inquiries the next day were fobbed off with half-hearted denials but faced with persistent callers a bald, five-line announcement was put out, saying Admiral Hermann Luedke, retired, had accidentally shot himself while hunting in a wood in the Pfel mountains, 40 miles from Bonn. His death occurred on Oct. 8, the same day as Gen. Wendtland died.

Police told reporters: "It appears he flung his hunting rifle in the back of the car without fixing the safety catch. When he climbed into the car the rifle must have gone off shooting him in the back."

But this theory was laughed at, for Admiral Luedke was a passionate hunter, a crack shot and a man known for taking all safety precautions, even unloading his weapon when taking a rest.

The body of another official — 61-year-old Defense Ministry clerk Gerhard Boehm, missing for 11 days, was found in the River Rhine.

Originally it was thought Boehm may have fled to the East altho he left a suicide note behind.

His body was identified by his son, and police spokesmen said that all the signs pointed to suicide.

They also said that his death was not connected with espionage cases. They said he was disappointed at not being promoted.

ANONYMOUS TIPS

But they admitted that last week two anonymous phone calls were made to police headquarters saying Boehm's briefcase, overcoat and hat could be found in a hut near the Rhine.

Chapter two begins with the surprise announcement by the public prosecutor of the arrest of three men.

They are Warrant Officer Class One of the German Luftwaffe Wolf-Diethard Knoppe, 33, architect and builder Manfred Ramminger of Krefeld and Polish born Josef Linkowski, 47, also of Krefeld.

These, of course, are the men who impudently stole the Sidewinder navigation instruments.

Knoppe, the boy who started as an unskilled laborer, joined the Luftwaffe and reached pilot's rank flying Starfighters, loved to show off.

He bought himself expensive cars, took up riding and planned an ambitious riding center in Ingoldstadt, near his flying field. He married clever and talented language student, 29-year-old Dagmar, the mother of his two children.

Ramminger, 40, is recognized as the man who led the brilliant pilot to flying. He appeared in Goldstein one day in a Ferrari sports car, of the type he used in races on the Norburgring.

Ramminger was under Moscow orders to obtain NATO equipment for the Russians and he gravitated naturally to Luftwaffe stations. At Ingoldstadt he met Knoppe, heard of his passion for horses and riding and offered to put up the money for the riding center.

OTHER DELIGHTS

From that moment it was no great task to ensnare the pilot — particularly if, as is said, he paid the bills for the young man's other delights, girls and night club life.

Says Dagmar: "I am fond of theater, opera and so on. In eight years of married life Wolf went once to an opera, left after the first act and went to the bar."

The Knoppe-Ramminger friendship began two years ago. At least one previous attempt to steal secret equipment went wrong.

But when the Sidewinder disappeared just a year ago it was the German federal CID which was brought in, not counter-espionage or intelligence services. Fifty clues were followed. They all came to an abrupt end. The 51st — and no one will say what it was — provided the key to the affair.

Ramminger was arrested at his home on October 22. With him went Josef Linkowski who has played an equally key role in the thefts.

In his case there is a mixture of hatred of Germans and an urgent need for cash. For he was sent to a concentration camp in 1939, survived those horrors and returned to Poland. Just when he returned is not known. In 1963 he married a Polish girl, 26-year-old Helena.

And he told her: "I hate all Germans". When his wife asked for a divorce he snapped: "Never. I will never allow the chance that you might remarry so that our son would call a German 'daddy'." She added: "He was often penniless, but somehow always got hold of money. Once I opened his post out of curiosity, for much of it came from abroad. He found out and beat me up. Never again, he said, was I to interfere with his mail."

With the arrest of Ramminger and Linkowski the seizure of Knoppe was inevitable.

Three days after Ramminger's arrest Knoppe was officially forbidden by his commanding officer to fly.

The day after detectives arrived, Knoppe took off his uniform, broke down and confessed to his wife who, altho they were divorced still lived in their old flat and was constantly visited by her ex-husband. He was there when the police arrived.

If suicide is infectious in Germany, so is spying.

And no better example can be pointed at than that of the double agent — only known as "X".

He, however, went to an allied intelligence agency, told them he was spying for the East



Manfred Ramminger

German communists and offered to doublecross them by working for the West.

After the usual security check he was engaged.

And it was he who provided the information last month for the arrest of physicist Harald Gottfried at the atomic center in Karlsruhe.

OTHERS IDENTIFIED

He also knew of six other Red agents working in the West — a married couple named Henning living in Hamburg, a couple named Breuel living in Frankfurt and two unnamed physicists.

Double agent X however, was let down — whether unwittingly or deliberately no one is ever likely to know.

It happened like this — after the arrest of Gottfried, a lawyer for his defense was duly appointed. The lawyer made loud noises that his client had been put on the spot by an agent — and an agent working not for the fatherland but for a foreign, if allied, power.

The grapevine inevitably worked, and the six Eastern agents who were under observation pending a convenient moment to pick them up, got the message loud and clear.

They hurriedly skipped, leaving an embarrassed German government to explain — and presumably apologize — to the allied government.

This brings us to the latest — (known) — episode in spies incorporated.

A Czech major in Prague intelligence defected last month. Maybe he was savagely bitter over the Russian rape of his country and decided to do a little towards squaring accounts.

Or maybe he was just doing his job under the new occupation would not last long.

A third theory — and you need to appreciate the dreadful convulsions of espionage, political as well as military to understand it — is that the major was told to defect.

Ordered to defect so as to create a diplomatic incident with the government of Bonn, so blindly and viciously hated by the communists.

NEWSMAN NAMED

Be that as it may, he came and shortly thereafter detectives appeared at the home of the Czech news agency chief Otakar Svercina. There is not the slightest doubt he was named by the major.

Svercina was interrogated for 10 hours and afterwards indignantly denied he has had anything to do with spying.

As all spies, of course, would.

Now it is also a fact that Svercina has long been suspected of being an agent for the old Novotny regime. But suspicious need to be proved.

Whether the major has brought the proof is not yet known. Svercina subsequently underwent another long interrogation bringing the total to 17 hours.

Bonn is just as well clued up on the labyrinth of agent activity as the dictator countries.

Which is probably why the chief government spokesman said cautiously he had "certain grounds for hopes that the case would not lead to

Anything at present not to give the communist ammunition to step up the anti-Western campaign, anything to stop communist accusations that Western imperialism is undermining the socialist countries — and thus give a pretext for action on Czech invasion lines.

Action against whom? Romania? Yugoslavia? West Berlin? There for the moment rests the complicated spy saga. Nobody expects it to remain so. The Czech major, we are told, has already handed a list of agents known to be working in the West for the Reds.